

CHAPTER TWO

The Only Path Is That of Revolutionary Violence

Immediately after I arrived in Hanoi I met with leaders of the party, the government, the Ministry of National Defense, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to report on the work of the Four-Party Joint Military Commission, on what had been accomplished and what had not yet been accomplished, on my conclusions after 60 days of face-to-face meetings with the Americans and puppets, on my observations regarding the situation, etc. I listened to their good observations and evaluations regarding the work of the Four-Party Joint Military Commission, the enemy plots, and what we would do next. Then I was granted several days' leave, after which I prepared for and participated in a plenary session of the Political Bureau of the party Central Committee regarding the situation and mission of the revolution in South Vietnam.

The members of COSVN and the Regional Command--Pham Hung, Muoi Cuc (Nguyen Van Linh, deputy secretary of COSVN), Hai Hau (Tran Nam Trung), Muoi Khang, and Sau Dan (Vo Van Kiet) came to Hanoi via the Truong Son route. We held a separate meeting regarding the B2 theater in order to reach agreement on our evaluation of the situation and our observations regarding the recent developments and our estimates of future developments. We exchanged experiences with Nam Cong (Vo Chi Cong) and Chu Huy Man of the Military Region 5 theater and Hoang Minh Thao of the B2 theater, who had come to Hanoi to participate in the conference.

During the last third of April 1973 the Political Bureau of the party Central Committee, along with delegates from the South Vietnam theaters, was in session. It was an extremely important conference. After the various parties signed the Paris Agreement, i.e. after we had won a decisive victory in the anti-U.S. war, forced the United States to end its war of destruction in the north, and forced the U.S. and vassal troops to withdraw from Vietnam, and especially after 60 days of implementing the agreement, during which there were a number of actual developments on the battlefield, that conference was held to reevaluate the situation, evaluate the balance of revolutionary and counterrevolutionary forces, and delineate the path of advance of the revolution in South Vietnam during the new revolutionary phase. That was a desire of everyone, of the cadres as well as the enlisted men and people.

Until that time, not everyone in the ranks of the cadres at the various echelons, on the battlefields, or even in the Central Committee, agreed about the value of the Paris Agreement, the balance of forces between ourselves and the enemy on the battlefield, and especially how the agreements should be implemented and how to cope with the enemy, who were increasingly violating the articles of the agreement. Even the developments on the battlefields differed because on each of them our conditions and those of the enemy were completely different, the strategic value of each battlefield in comparison to the war as a whole differed, and the leaders on those battlefields had different outlooks and acted differently. That was a reality that could be no other way.

Therefore, if common evaluations and policies were based on the actual developments, dangerous mistakes would be made if the theater was not representative of all the rest or was not strategically important with regard to the war as a whole. If, while the war situation was changing, we did not correctly evaluate the role of each theater, mistakes would be made in organizing and deploying forces, and in adopting strategic, campaign and tactical policies, which would of course affect victory or defeat in the war. It was not that no mistakes were made in our war against the U.S. aggressors to liberate the nation. But thanks to the wise, democratic and centralized leadership of our party we were able to promptly correct our mistakes and win victory. Revolution is an undertaking of the masses. Each success or defeat of the revolution in each phase is a success or defeat of the thought and acts of millions of people, especially the collective leadership. It was never a case of "failures are due to you and successes are due to me." In each phase of the revolution, at each historical turning point, correct policies and actions are always the results of collective thought and knowledge, of the combination of many minds, from the mind of the highest leader to the minds of the enlisted men and ordinary people when, out of patriotism and love for the people, they plunge into the actual, specific, lively tasks on the battlefield: No one is always right and no one is always wrong, for everyone is human. What is noblest and wisest is to recognize one's mistakes and resolutely and promptly correct them. Even collective leadership is not always right. But it is certain that the collective leadership makes fewer mistakes than individual leaders. President Ho, the talented leader of our party and our nation, recapitulated and heightened the tradition of our party and nation by means of a very concise but very profound sentence: "Solidarity, solidarity, complete solidarity. Success, success, complete success."

Solidarity in this case is not merely solidarity in action but also in all other spheres: thought, cognizance, ideology and will. It was because he was imbued with that tradition that he was a person who was extremely simple and modest. In him was concentrated the intelligence of everyone, and his thoughts became everyone's thoughts. The virtue of Ho Chi Minh spread light throughout the nation and illuminated the soul of Vietnam. He not only fully understood himself but fully understood everyone else; he was just, upright, and full of love.

Our people forged their tradition in the process of founding and defending their nation by means of the saying, "One tree alone amounts to nothing, but three trees clustered together form a high mountain." The Vietnam people are like that and Ho Chi Minh was like that!

I still remember many questions asked by many cadres from the various theaters, such as, "The Agreement has been signed, so why haven't the puppet army and the puppet administration collapsed?" Or else they made such observations as "The Americans have left but the puppets not only haven't collapsed but have become stronger," or, "The Americans have been defeated but at the same time the puppet administration has not only continued to exist but has become stronger politically, militarily and economically."

There was some superficial evidence which, added to the nefarious, obstinate plots and highly subjective plans of the Americans, prevented those comrades from understanding the true nature of the situation.

Immediately after the Paris Agreement took effect the puppets sent troops to take a number of important areas we were occupying, such as Cua Viet (Tri Thien), Sa Huynh (Quang Ngai), Route 4 (My Tho), Route 2 (Ba Ria), the Bay Nui area (Long Xuyen), etc. They not only took many areas we had expanded into prior to 28 January but also took some areas we had controlled for some time. At the same time, they impetuously launched many sweeping and police operations in areas that previously had been contested by us and the enemy. In the areas under their control, they carried out pacification operations and eliminating our enclave guerrilla bases, in order to eliminate our interspersed positions and expand and fill out their areas. On nearly all battlefields they set up additional outposts in the areas they had just taken and further expanded the areas they controlled along the strategic routes and around the large cities. In the provinces of My Tho, Go Cong, Kien Tuong, and Ben Tre, between January and April 1973 they established 287 additional outposts in 129 hamlets of 24 villages. Also during that time, the Americans brought in weapons and war facilities from the Philippines, the United States and Japan, to bolster and develop the puppet army. They provided additional modern weapons for the puppet army, such as M48 tanks, 175mm "king of the battlefield" cannon, F5E aircraft, etc. The puppets employed all measures to conscript soldiers on a large scale. On the average, every month they conscripted 15,000 youths. Therefore, they were able to rapidly supplement their regular army. The rest of the youths--a rather large reserve force--were trained in the recruit training center, all of which were full. The regional forces and civilian defense forces were greatly increased. By forming mobile Regional Force groups to fight locally in place of the regular army units, during the first 6 months of 1973 the number of RF battalions increased from 189 to 337. In the cities, they strongly developed the police forces. Many police field force battalions were formed, especially in Saigon. The U.S.-puppet plan was to continue to develop the puppet army into a 1.1 million-man army that was modernized, younger, and more effective, especially by strengthening the technical combat arms. The air force would be increased to 1,500-1,800 aircraft of various kinds. There would be 31 to 35 armored regiments, etc.

In addition to consolidating and developing the puppet army, they went all-out to consolidate the puppet regime from the central level down to the basic level. They sent pacification cadres to the villages and hamlets and sent army officers to set up village subsectors--the main tools of fascist suppression--in order to gain tighter control over the people by such activities as consolidating the interfamily system, developing the "regiment the masses" program, etc. They developed agents and spies in all hamlets and sent them into the contested areas and our liberated areas. In order to back up the puppet Thieu regime, and be prepared to support its lackey armies in Indochina--mainly in South Vietnam--the United States stationed in Southeast Asia a mobile military force made up of four aircraft carriers, 735 tactical aircraft and 173 B52 strategic bombers.

All of the above were pursued vigorously by the Americans and puppets as soon as the agreement was signed. It may be said that after the agreement was signed they stepped up their attacks and exercised even tighter control over the people, thus creating considerable difficulties for us.

Meanwhile, for our part, because they had been in continuous action since April 1972 our cadres and men were fatigued, we had not had time to make up for our losses, all units were in disarray, there was a lack of manpower, and there were shortages of food and ammunition, so it was very difficult to cope with the enemy's attacks. In some places we had to retreat and allow the enemy to gain control of the land people. In addition, a number of cadres and some localities, in a spirit of implementing the upper echelon's directive to fully implement the Paris Agreement, were afraid to retaliate against the enemy out of fear of violating the agreement, carried out the work of proselyting among the enemy troops to neutralize the puppet troops in a rightist, dangerous manner, concretized in the form of "five forbids": It was forbidden to attack the enemy; it was forbidden to attack enemy troops carrying out sweeping and land-grabbing operations; it was forbidden to surround outposts; it was forbidden to shell puppet outposts; and it was forbidden to build combat villages. They thought that that would stabilize the situation and avoid creating tension, in order to achieve national conciliation and concord. In a number of places forward units were sent to the rear to be reorganized and consolidated. They thought that if such units were not withdrawn to the rear they would be annihilated. In fact, when one of our armed units was pulled back the enemy methodically destroyed the mass infrastructure, wiped out our party infrastructure, and eliminated the "leopard spot" there.

Against such a background, when they witnessed such initial confused events a number of cadres from the central level down to the local level thought that since the agreement we had grown much weaker and the enemy had grown much stronger. The enemy was winning many new victories while we had suffered additional losses. Thus they concluded that the enemy was stronger than we were, that the balance of forces on the battlefield had changed in favor of the enemy, and that the revolution was in danger. Because of such observations, there were a number of incorrect policies and actions. I will return to that subject later.

That conference of the Political Bureau of the party Central Committee fully resolved all worries of the cadres and war theaters. It scientifically and correctly analyzed the balance of forces between ourselves and the enemy, profoundly analyzed the situation, and set forth a wise policy for guiding the revolution in South Vietnam to victory. The party Central Committee reached unanimous agreement on the results of that conference and issued the 21st Resolution of the party Central Committee. But in order to arrive at that unanimity, the Political Bureau conference passed through a rather animated, and at times very tense, discussion. There was a clashing of many different opinions and interpretations regarding the developments on the battlefields. As a participant in the conference, I was deeply impressed by the strong sense of responsibility of all of the comrades participating in the conference, their spirit of straightforwardly reflecting the actual situation on the battlefield, their spirit of struggling strongly for truth, and their spirit of patriotism, solidarity, and objectivity. That was the democratic, centralized working method of our party, the secret of all correct policies and successes.

The matter that was discussed most seethingly from the very beginning was the question of who was stronger, we or the enemy. It is not easy to evaluate

strengths and weaknesses. If one speaks in generalities without getting into specifics, one cannot determine what is strong and what is weak. If one gets into specifics that are not the most universal ones, conclusions about weakness and strength may not be entirely correct, and indeed the opposite may be true. There is also the question of whether a strength or weakness in a certain place or at a certain time is temporary or basic, and the capability of such weaknesses or strengths to change. And it must also be understood what strength is. For example, after the agreement was signed the puppet regular army battalions were rapidly increased to between 400 and 550 men, with ample food and ammunition, while our main-force battalions had not yet been augmented and totaled at most 200 men, with insufficient ammunition and food. After the American and vassal troops withdrew, the puppets' total troop strength was between 700,000 and 1.1 million, while our forces on the battlefield amounted to at most one-third those of the enemy. It would be incorrect to conclude from that that the puppets were strong and we were weak. In addition to those material numbers, it is necessary to add together many other factors, such as the morale of the soldiers, the deployment of units and their missions in campaign and strategic plans, in attacks and defense today and tomorrow, etc. That is not to mention much broader factors, such as the political factor, the combat objectives, the factor of the people. Our just liberation war, as pointed out by many party resolutions, is waged by both military and political forces. We attack the enemy with both political forces and mass political forces. In speaking of strengths and weaknesses one cannot consider only the military aspect, but must consider all aspects, including the political situations of the two sides.

During several decades of war we had to evaluate the balance of forces between ourselves and the enemy many times. In 1959, the most difficult period of the revolution in South Vietnam, the Ngo Dinh Diem puppet regime dragged the guillotine everywhere and carried out a bloody fascist suppression. There was only one army--that of Diem--holding sway on the battlefield, like a martial arts performer demonstrating his skills in a ring without an opponent. Even so, Resolution 15 of the party Central Committee created a simultaneous uprising movement with stormlike strength which liberated many large areas and caused the Americans to panic and launch a special war to prevent the Diem clique from collapsing. If, at that time, we had not had a revolutionary, dialectical point of view we could not have realized that we still had latent strength among the people, but would have seen only the specific strength of the enemy. In 1965, the number of people supporting the revolution in the various areas was quite large, especially in the Mekong Delta, but that number could not have been larger than the number of people under enemy control (but don't think that the people under enemy control belonged to the enemy). In our armed forces, the guerrillas were relatively strong but only a small number of main-force regiments had been formed. In the B2 theater at that time there were only two combat-ready regiments. As for the enemy, in addition to regional forces and militia they had a dozen divisions with strong technical equipment and tens of thousands of U.S. advisers, and they were supported by U.S. helicopter units, combat aircraft, and naval ships which participated directly in the fighting. Despite that, we launched the Binh Gia campaign, wiped out many strong battalions of the enemy and armored squadrons, shot down many airplanes, and began a new era in the war. After

the attack on the Bien Hoa airbase, the Binh Gia campaign, and then the victorious battles at Ba Gia and Pleiku, the Americans and puppets clearly realized that the puppet army would be annihilated and the puppet regime would collapse. Thus the Americans had to impetuously send in U.S. troops to save the puppets, put out the fire, and transform the special war into a limited war, in correct accordance with America's "flexible response" global strategy, so that it could play its role of international gendarme.

Prior to the arrival of the U.S. troops, if the balance of forces between ourselves and the enemy had been viewed simply in terms of specific, materiel forces, who would have thought that we were strong and were capable of annihilating the puppet army and overthrowing the puppet regime? Later, when the United States sent in at the same time about 200,000 troops who had modern equipment and relied on the strength of overwhelming firepower and rapid mobility, to carry out a strategic counter offensive during the 1965-1966 dry season, we concluded that the Americans and puppets were not strong but were passive, and continued to press the strategic offensive, launched the Bau Bang-Dau Tieng offensive campaign, gained the initiative on the battlefield, and won many victories. In 1968, when the U.S. troops numbered nearly 500,000, with all kinds of modern weapons except the atomic bomb and with the purchasing of the services of lackey vassal troops in addition to Thieu's army, we could clearly see the enemy's weakness and our strength, and exploited that strength to a high degree in carrying out the general offensive and uprising of Tet Mau Than, a unique event in the history of war. During Tet we not only attacked the enemy simultaneously in all urban centers, including the U.S. war headquarters in Saigon, the puppet capital, but also wiped out an important part of the U.S.-puppet manpower. That strategic blow defeated the U.S. limited war strategy and forced the United States to deescalate the war, begin peace talks in Paris, and adopt the strategy of "de-Americanizing the war" and then "Vietnamizing the war." We thus smashed the U.S. imperialists' strategic global "flexible response" strategy. The international gendarme became terrified of the role it had taken for itself; and the illusion of the "absolute military superiority of the United States" was shattered.

However, during Tet of 1968 we did not correctly evaluate the specific balance of forces between ourselves and the enemy, did not fully realize that the enemy still had considerable capabilities and that our capabilities were limited, and set requirements that were beyond our actual strength. In other words, we did not base ourselves on scientific calculation or a careful weighing of all factors, but in part on an illusion based on our subjective desires. For that reason, although that decision was wise, ingenious, and timely, and although its implementation was well organized and bold, there was excellent coordination on all battlefields, everyone acted very bravely, sacrificed their lives, and there was created a significant strategic turning point in Vietnam and Indochina, we suffered large sacrifices and losses with regard to manpower and materiel, especially cadres at the various echelons, which clearly weakened us. Afterwards, we were not only unable to retain the gains we had made but had to overcome a myriad of difficulties in 1969 and 1970 so that the revolution could stand firm in the storm. Although it is true that the revolutionary path is never a primrose path that always goes upward, and there can

never be a victory without sacrifice, in the case of Tet 1968, if we had weighed and considered things meticulously, taken into consideration the balance of forces of the two sides, and set forth correct requirements, our victory would have been even greater, less blood would have been spilled by the cadres, enlisted men, and people, and the future development of the revolution would certainly have been far different. In 1972, after a period of endeavoring to overcome many difficulties make up for the recent losses, and develop our position and strength with an absolute revolutionary spirit on the part of the soldiers and people, our troops participated in winning victories in Kampuchea and Laos. However, not all of our main-force units could return to South Vietnam. In that situation, we correctly evaluated the positions and forces of the two sides, destroyed many fortified defense lines of the enemy in Quang Tri, the Central Highlands, and eastern Nam Bo, and created many integrated liberated areas at Dong Ha, Dac To, Tan Canh, Loc Ninh Bu Dop, and northern Tay Ninh then, in coordination with the great "Dien Bien Phu in the air" victory in the North, attained our goal of smashing the American's scheme of negotiating from a position of strength, and forced the Americans to sign in Paris, agreements which benefited us.

Clearly, in each phase of the revolution and of revolutionary war, the correct evaluation of our strength and that of the enemy, correctly realizing the weaknesses of the enemy and ourselves, and correctly evaluating the balance of forces between the two sides are the most basic conditions for the adoption of correct policies to guide the revolution from one victory to another. Our party's leadership of the Vietnamese revolution to complete victory was also based on an evaluation of the balance of forces between revolution and counterrevolution, not only in our country but in the world, was generally correct, although at times and in places, and in some specific details, mistakes were made. But correctness was dominant and determined victory. In actuality, nothing is completely correct. One should not fear speaking about mistakes, but only fear not realizing or correcting mistakes. But every time the balance of forces between ourselves and the enemy it is possible to be rightist and fear the enemy or to be leftist, subjective and faltering in policies and actions. For that reason, evaluations of the situation and of the balance of forces must be based on lines and policies, collective intelligence and on actual developments.

The signing of the Paris Agreement was the clearest manifestation of the balance of forces on the battlefield at that time. The Americans and puppets also carefully evaluated the balance of forces between the two sides after having contended with us in South Vietnam to avoid losing additional land, and carried out the barbarous, evil scheme of using B52's to bomb Hanoi and Hai Phong, and blockading the North. Only after evaluating their capability and will and those of their adversary were they willing to pick up a pen and sign the agreement, and agree to a number of conditions which did not benefit them. We also carefully weighed the strength of the enemy, their schemes, and the possibility of concluding agreements with many points that benefited us. Thus the Paris Agreement was signed on the basis of the enemy and ourselves weighing the strengths and weaknesses of each other and the balance of forces in the world. By signing the Paris Agreement the Americans were willing to accept a partial defeat, but that was all. We had won a victory, but

not yet a complete victory. But that defeat for the United States and victory for us proved that the revolution was stronger than counterrevolution. So how could we be weak and the enemy strong?

The most important provisions of the agreements, one which affected the war as a whole, were that all U.S. and vassal troops had to withdraw from South Vietnam and that the United States had to end its war of destruction in the north of our country. The interesting thing about those provisions was that they seemed to fit in with the Vietnamization strategy and with the Nixon Doctrine of "regional alliances and self-defense," so that the United States would not have to flee even though it had been defeated. It was interesting in that it helped the United States withdraw its troops to America, satisfy the demands of the American people, and extricate itself from a dilemma: it was no longer being able to maintain a U.S. army abroad but was being increasingly defeated to the point of complete defeat. That withdrawal from South Vietnam as stipulated by the agreement, i.e., with the agreement of the two sides, helped the United States to avoid losing face. As for us, those provisions were extremely important for the development of the revolution in our country and in Indochina. Prior to the agreement we had to fight both the puppet troops and hundreds of thousands of U.S. and vassal troops strongly supported by U.S. naval and air forces, including B52 strategic bombers. Once the agreements took effect and the U.S. and vassal troops withdrew from the battlefield, the puppet troops could no longer rely on the U.S. troops and no longer were strongly supported by U.S. air and naval forces. The puppets' firepower was much weaker than that of the Americans. Although the puppet troops were increased in number and were provided additional facilities and weapons--some of which were more modern than those they had in the past--by their U.S. masters, in order to develop the effectiveness of the new combat arms and new forces, a period of training and tempering was required. However, meeting the technical requirements of the puppet army and of modernization was not an easy matter and could not be achieved in just a few years. That is not to mention the morale status of the puppet troops, who were perplexed by the reaction of the popular masses after the Paris Agreement was signed. In actuality, on the battlefield--according to the reports from all units and localities--after the agreements took effect the firepower of the puppet artillery and air force decreased appreciably and was increasingly tending to decline even more. The puppet artillery and air support given the infantry was very poor, for their firing was inaccurate and the number of shells was limited. The puppet troops, who were accustomed to relying on the U.S. troops, now had to fight alone without the effective aid and support of the United States, so their morale clearly declined. Thus after the agreements the balance of forces on the battlefield changed in an important way in our favor. The fighting strength of the puppet troops declined clearly and our position and strength developed strongly. Even so, there was no basis for thinking that after the Americans withdrew the puppets got stronger, and were stronger than we were, which was no different from imagining a ghost in order to scare oneself.

The agreement stipulated the ending of all U.S. military activities against the territory of the DRV by all forces, on the land, in the air, and at sea, no matter what their point of origin. Thus the socialist North would have

very good conditions to develop the great effectiveness of the base area of the entire conditions, and would have good conditions for fulfilling as well as possible its role of being the great rear area of the revolution in South Vietnam. If we had good position and strength in the South and throughout the nation it was certain that we would victoriously fulfill our glorious revolutionary enterprise, although we would have to overcome many difficulties. But we also had to realize our remaining weaknesses and not be subjective, so that we could endeavor to overcome them. Our armed forces were in disarray and had to be urgently supplemented and consolidated. Our local troops and guerrillas were still too few and there were still many deficiencies in our proselyting work among the enemy. But we would overcome those weaknesses from a position of victory and strength and with a spirit of enthusiasm and self-confidence.

Due to a lack of such understanding, there was worry that our forces exposed to the enemy would be annihilated and that our free areas would be lost, so a number of mistaken viewpoints were rectified by the conference of the Political Bureau and its 21st Resolution. Otherwise, countless calamities would have resulted. One of those viewpoints was that we should urgently stabilize the situation by abandoning the contested areas and take the initiative in forming two areas: our area and the enemy's area. One was that we should readjust and reorganize our forces and withdraw our forces from enemy areas to our areas so that they could be consolidated and reorganized. One was that we should carry out those tasks as soon as possible. Another was that we must have clearly defined areas in order to have appropriate struggle slogans, and could not waver.

Clearly, the puppet regime of Nguyen Van Thieu desired that very much. They were very afraid of the interspersed, "leopard spot" configuration on the battlefield. Our forces were everywhere, even in their urban areas and in their capital. They were able to evaluate the operational and combat effectiveness of each of our party members, commandos, and guerrillas. They were also able to evaluate one of our small armed units in an area under their control and in enclave guerrilla areas. Each such person and each such unit was a gun-barrel pointed at the enemy's temple, a source of support for the people's morale, and a pillar of the local secret mass organizations. Each of their actions was a source of propaganda which bolstered patriotism and the revolution and opposed suppression, oppression, and injustice. Their actions spoke louder than their words. Their image was that of a light in darkness, a light which although small at first was spreading over an increasingly larger area and could never be extinguished. Each party member and soldier, and each small unit, in turn, had a source of support in our larger units--platoons, companies, battalions, or larger units--scattered all over the various areas, in temporarily occupied areas, the contested areas, and the areas contiguous to our free areas. That was a system from which we could not lose a single link. It was an all-encompassing strategy of revolutionary war which caused the enemy troops to suffocate, to worry apprehensively day and night, and think that all places had to be defended and they could be safe only with large forces. Had not the Americans calculated that to cope with one of our men they had to have 5, and then 10 to 20 men?

Despite that, should we voluntarily withdraw our forces from the areas controlled by the enemy and the contested areas to the rear in order to consolidate them, and ourselves erase the very effective "comb's teeth" position of the revolution, which terrified the enemy? By doing so would we not give the enemy a hand so that they could do other, more important things, which they had been unable to do after many years of fierce attacks and pacification? If it was argued that that was a temporary measure for a certain time, while we consolidated our forces, so that after we had regained our strength we could return and operate more effectively, that was due to the imagination of impractical people. In fact when, in the B2 theater, we withdrew or abandoned a certain base, even on our own accord, within a few days the enemy would occupy that area, gain control of the people, launch sweeping operations, and set up outposts. When we wanted to send forces back to open up an area or an enclave, and organize our masses, we practically had to start from the beginning. It was even more difficult than work in areas in which we had never had a base, and much blood had to be shed by our comrades and compatriots. The comrades who operated behind enemy lines and in contested areas have much experience in that regard. Each comrade and each unit remaining in a base and creating the core of a political or guerrilla base was extremely valuable in a life-and-death struggle such as that between ourselves and the enemy. Every loss of an infrastructure or a base nucleus was a source of worry and pain which we had to find all ways to overcome.

Here I would like to mention the example of unparalleled heroism on the part of the cadres and men of the 320th Regiment who, in 1969-1970, were assigned the mission of operating in Long An Province, in the Duc Hue, Ben Luc, Can Duoc, Can Giuoc, Tan Tru, Chau Thanh, and Tan An areas. During that period, none of us could forget that after Tet Mau Than [1968] the Americans sent additional troops to Vietnam, stepped up shipments of all kinds of weapons and ammunition, attained their highest troop level during the war, and insanely counterattacked us. The Americans and puppets continuously attacked, and carried out very fierce sweeping and pacification operations. In many places our people were massacred and herded into strategic hamlets. Many infrastructures were lost and many comrades were lost, especially in the areas adjacent to cities and the highly populated areas which were important strategically. Long An was such an area. It surrounded Saigon from the northwest to the southwest and was a highly populated, fertile area, was the gateway to the Mekong Delta, connected the delta with Saigon, and connected our Dong Thap Muoi area with the northern Tay Ninh revolutionary base. Long An was also a province with a long revolutionary tradition of fighting the French and the Americans. The National Liberation Front of South Vietnam bestowed on its people, who were very patriotic and resolute, the golden words "Loyal and resolute, all the people fight the enemy." For those reasons the Americans and puppets concentrated their attacks there and at times made Long An a pacification test point. But they still suffered a bitter defeat.

In addition to all kinds of puppet forces, the Americans used part of the 25th "Tropical Lightning" Division and the 3d Brigade of the 9th Division. I remember that the Long An cadres said to me, "It's true that the enemy is climbing down the ladder of [deescalating] the war, but they have placed the feet of the ladder in Long An Province!" Long An was the last rung, so the

more they deescalated the more troops they sent there and the more fiercely they attacked and bombed! It was truly a strange metaphor--everyone laughed when they first heard it--but it described well the developments at that time. We definitely would not allow the enemy to succeed there, for that would considerably influence the common movement. The Regional Command held many discussions, weighed all factors, and decided to strengthen our forces in Long An. It sent the 320th Regiment, along with the local forces, to fight the enemy, maintain the movement, and maintain our infrastructure and guerrilla bases. The 320th Regiment was a unit with many accomplishments which had undergone much testing in combat and in bearing terrible hardships. It had been an independent main-force regiment which had long operated as a whole unit in a mountains-and-jungle environment, but now it was sent to a highly populated lowland area with open terrain that was intersected by many rivers and canals, and had to fight flexibly, by individual companies and battalions, and often had to disperse into platoons and squads. It not only had to fight to annihilate the enemy but also had to proselytize and organize the masses, proselytize enemy troops, eliminate spies, kill tyrants, and guide and coordinate with the guerrillas and district troops. Sending a concentrated main-force unit to operate in such a dispersed manner, so that it could be said to be no longer a main-force unit, was a reluctant necessity under those circumstances and at that time.

In a war in which our varied operational forms are many and varied and the situation on the battlefield changes every day, such decisions are not unusual. At a time when the guerrillas and local troops in that area had been worn down and had not yet been consolidated, but we had to maintain the movement, that was a correct decision. But there are also instances in which it would be incorrect to use main-force troops in lowland areas, or think that by sending in main-force units it would be possible to open up the lowlands. That is not the case (I will have more to say on that subject later).

On 18 December 1968, on behalf of the Regional Military Party Committee and the Regional Command, I went to a location in Tay Ninh Province to work and assign missions to the regiment in its assembly area, in order to prepare in all ways for the new task. I walked for about 10 days; with a pack on my back, using a rattan walking stick, with my pants rolled up above my knees, and wearing well-worn rubber sandals. I and a heavily armed bodyguard squad made our way along twisting jungle paths and open areas flooded with stagnant water. In the wild tropical jungles there were all kinds of big trees intertwined with vines that had become tattered and denuded, and trees that had lost their tops and leaves because of bombs, shells and chemical poisons. It was a pitiful sight. Comrade Hung, my loyal bodyguard, who was small but wiry and was from Be Cat, which also has many jungles, lay in a hammock near mine in a clump of trees that had not yet been defoliated. After a hard day's journey, he was quietly swaying his hammock. I asked, "Hung, why don't you get some sleep so you'll be fresh when we set out early tomorrow morning? We still have a long way to go." Hung replied, "Oh! I saw you laying there quietly so I thought you were asleep! I'm so sad that our jungles have been so devastated. It takes decades for a tree to grow so big." Hung pointed to a large tree near us that had been uprooted by a bomb and continued, "My home area has also been devastated." To console both Hung and myself I said,

"After we kill all of the enemy troops our country will be much better. Our people are able and creative, so why worry? Our jungles will again be green."

In the regiment's bivouac area the jungle was a little better. There were temporary huts made of small branches and roofed with "trung quan" leaves (leaves as large as a man's hand which do not burn even when dry and grew all over the jungles of South Vietnam). Each hut was big enough for a squad. My squad and I were also assigned a hut. Representatives of the Long An Party Committee and provincial unit had arrived on the previous day to participate in a work session and discuss a coordination plan with the regimental staff. I met comrade Nguyen Duc Khoi, the regimental commander; Le Van Minh, the political officer; and Hong Hai and Trinh Ngoc Cham, the deputy regimental commanders. Those beloved, brave cadres would gloriously sacrifice their lives in battle in 1969 and 1970. I also met many other outstanding cadres in the regimental command, the regiment's staff, political, and rear services organs, and the battalion commands. Some of them became martyrs and others matured, gained experience, and added to the glorious tradition of the regiment, or were assigned elsewhere.

The meeting took place an hour after I arrived, just as soon as the cadres could be convened. We needed no assembly hall and there were no desks and chairs--the men sat on mounds of earth and logs in a cleared area in the jungle under a canopy of green leaves. We worked only during the day. At night, under the light of the stars and the moon, I visited the huts and talked with the cadres and men about their home areas, their families, the war situation in South Vietnam, Hanoi and even the situation in the United States and the world. We talked about all sorts of things, serious subjects, frivolous subjects, and even private thoughts and problems. Every night I visited the huts and returned to my hut late at night to go to sleep. Even so, I didn't have enough time to visit all of the huts.

Standing before a map of eastern Nam Bo--including Long An and Go Cong Provinces and part of Dong Thap Muoi--hanging from a tree trunk, and holding a bamboo stick I had just taken from a nearby cluster of bamboo, I solemnly and directly assigned missions to the regiment. Then I discussed the terrain and our situation and that of the enemy in the places in which the enemy would operate. None of the regimental cadres knew anything about the area. Because I had served since the anti-French resistance war and had waded and walked over the entire area, I was the only one who knew about the people and terrain there and gave the men an initial briefing. I gave them specific instructions about the operational missions, guidelines, and modes, the tactical forms the enemy had used and would use in each area of the province, and the tactics and techniques we needed to apply to win victory. I spoke about the mass proselyting methods, the task of organizing guerrillas and assisting the local troops, and the task of combining the regiment's unit with the local village and district units and the regiment with the provincial unit. Finally, I instructed them about the party work and the political work, and about the spiritual and material lives of the cadres and men in all forms of activity: in large units, in small units, and in individual, scattered teams.

After that briefing the men had 2 days in which to discuss all aspects. I cleared up their remaining questions.

I could never forget those days of urgent and serious work and the sincere, overflowing sentiment in the 320th Regiment. Its men, both the cadres and enlisted men, accepted their mission enthusiastically, discussed it excitedly, and tried to envision the coming battles and the hardships awaiting them.

Not enough can be said about the extremely difficult period during which the cadres and men of the regiment shared hardships with the local cadres and with the guerrillas and people, holding their ground despite bombing and shelling that were so fierce that their only fortifications were the roots of coconut trees. Who wouldn't remember their strange lives: every day living in the mud and stagnant water, firing at helicopters and airplanes, resisting the sweeping operations and "hit and run"* operations of the 3d Brigade of the U.S. 9th Division, and every night discussing with the people plans to attack the enemy or buying food and ammunition from strategic hamlets. How could one forget the tense, worrisome night crossings of the Vam Co River? It took a company 5 to 7 days to cross from one district to another, then it had to cross Route 4, along which the enemy had placed outposts, barbed wire, minefields, etc. In addition, for month after month we had to carry our wounded to the rear and bring up weapons, ammunition and recruits via a route nearly 100 kilometers long in the interspersed area, with the slogans "Persistence, stalwartness, and taking the offensive," and "living and fighting here, and also dying here, for the success of the revolution." (Today, before Tet the people in the Can Duoc, Tan Tru, Duc Hue and Chau Thanh areas tidy up the graves of the unknown soldiers of the 320th Regiment in remembrance of them!) The regiment and the localities were able to maintain the revolutionary infrastructures and bases of the districts, villages, and guerrilla enclaves during the most difficult period. During the spring of 1975 the regiment, then part of the 8th Division of Military Region 8, along with the other forces participated in the annihilation of each battalion and regiment of the puppet 7th Division, in coordination with the uprising of the people, in order to liberate the Tien Giang area. With its example of glorious combat, the regiment, along with the other units and localities all over the battlefield, provided the B2 theater with valuable experience. Because of such models on the battlefield, the comrades in COSVN and the Regional Party military Commission would not agree to withdraw their forces to the rear, but gave the order to consolidate and reorganize on the spot and maintain the interspersed position in the three areas, and positively reported that opinion to the Central Committee.

There was also the question of two areas or three areas. Throughout the life-or-death struggle between ourselves and the enemy, a fierce, tense struggle

*"Hit and run" was a local term describing a widespread tactic of the U.S. troops in Long An at that time. That tactic was carrying out a surprise attack by landing small units from a few helicopters which flew low and slow. The troops would fire indiscriminately and fiercely into a few suspected positions of our troops, bases of local cadres or places where people were concentrated. Then they would quickly jump aboard the helicopters and make a quick getaway.

took place in all parts of the theater, and on that basis there took form three areas. One was the area in which we were strong, our large units stood fast, and the people participated in all activities and in attacking the enemy by all means, political, military proselyting, and military. Another was the area in which the enemy was strong, exercised military and political control, and heavily suppressed and exploited. In that area, we secretly organized the masses and had guerrillas, commandos and sappers. We had political cells in which the people secretly had the cadres and helped the revolution by deceiving the enemy in many ways and operating openly and legally. There were guerrilla bases in which weapons and food were cached; there were guerrillas, and sometimes local troops and spearhead main-force units which operated in place. Of course, there were party chapters to provide on-the-spot leadership, the central factor of the movement. Between our area and that of the enemy there was a so-called contested area, which was large or small depending on the location. That was an area in which the two sides were equally strong and were fiercely competing with each other; it was constantly undergoing upheaval and change, at times every day and every hour. In that area most of the popular masses supported the revolution and there were all kinds of revolutionary forces and organizations. District and provincial local troops often operated there, and at times a main-force unit of the military zone or of the upper echelon came into the area to fight the enemy and support the local forces. The enemy often launched sweeping operations, shelled and bombed, and herded the people into areas under their control. It may be said that the struggle there, waged by all means at the disposal of both sides, took place every hour, night and day. Some places were controlled by the enemy during the day and by us at night. Each side tried to push out the other so that it could gain full control. Therefore, the contested area changed continually, like a strip of sand buffeted by winds from two directions. If the wind blew more strongly from one direction the sand would pile up on the other side and spill over on that side, and vice versa. As long as there were two sides--revolution and counterrevolution--and they continued to struggle to control the land and people there would be a contested area. It would disappear only when there was no longer a struggle between the two sides, i.e. when one side yielded and the other side won complete victory. The Paris Agreement did not end the struggle between revolution and counterrevolution and could not immediately end the armed struggle, for the enemy committed violations and grabbed land as described above, hoping to achieve the result of there being only one regime--the puppet regime--and one army--the puppet army. Thus the viewpoint that we should form only two clear areas--the enemy area and our area--in order to have struggle guidelines appropriate to each other in order to immediately stabilize the situation, and so that we could consolidate and rebuild our weakened armed forces and build up economy and governmental administration was completely inappropriate. I still remember that in the meeting held by the comrades in COSVN to prepare for the Political Bureau conference they agreed unanimously that on the basis of the actual situation in the B2 theater it was necessary, under all circumstances and at all times, to keep up the struggle in all three areas. Only if we gave up the struggle would we lose the contested area. In fact, if we did so, the area under our control would gradually become a contested area and then would become an area controlled by the enemy, so that eventually there would not be both our area and a contested area but only an area under enemy control.

According to an analysis by those comrades, there could never be a stable situation on the battlefield because neither we nor the enemy would give up the struggle; even if there was no longer armed struggle there would be political and economic struggle.

During the plenary meeting of the Political Bureau comrade Tran Huu Duc, who had been sent to the Tri Thien [Quang Tri-Thua Thien] theater to study the actual situation, returned to report to the conference that Tri Thien had completed a territorial realignment: the enemy's area extended from the railroad to the sea and our area extended from the railroad to the Laotian border. Our units had been withdrawn to our area so that they could be strengthened. The situation had stabilized and our men were enthusiastic, etc.

We expressed our viewpoint that to do so was dangerous. Such stability would be only temporary. After the enemy had time to reorganize they would attack west of the railroad and if we resisted the contested area would reappear. But this time the contested area would be entirely west of the railroad. Without meaning to we would voluntarily turn over additional land to the enemy and help them destroy our interspersed position, eliminate the "leopard spot" configuration, and fill out their area, an area with fertile land, good roads and a large population which included nearly all of the towns and cities. Anyone could see what the prospects for the future were. As far as the enemy was concerned, such a territorial realignment was ideal. The puppet Thieu regime and the U.S. strategic research companies had researched three territorial realignment modes to serve as a basis for the struggle at the conference table in Paris.

1. A territorial realignment by dividing South Vietnam along a parallel. The area north of that parallel would belong to the Viet Cong (the PRG of the RSVN) and the area south of that parallel would belong to the puppet Thieu regime.
2. A division along the length of South Vietnam. The mountainous area along the Laotian and Kampuchean borders, which had few people, was poor economically, and had poor roads, would be the "Viet Cong" area and the area along the sea, which had a large population and was advantageous in all regards, would be the area of the puppet Thieu regime.
3. An in-place ceasefire, with forces remaining where they were and interspersed zones of control would be formed.

Of those three modes, the puppets were most afraid of the third, with its interspersed "leopard spot" areas of control, for they felt there could be no ceasefire with such an arrangement and that it was quite possible that the people would arise to oppose and annihilate them. If their area were not an integrated whole it would be very difficult for them to develop their economy, effectively control the people, etc. They preferred the vertical division according to the second mode, for such a division would be entirely beneficial to them. They thought that before long, with U.S. aid they would become rich and strong, control large numbers of people, and eventually annihilate the PRG of the RSVN and gain sole control of South Vietnam.

We struggled at the conference table, but only by shedding much blood on the battlefield were we able to force the enemy to reluctantly accept an in-place ceasefire. So would we now voluntarily bring about a vertical division?

Resolution 21 stated clearly that "At present the position and strength of the revolution in South Vietnam are stronger than at any time since 1954" and that "The new victory of the people of Vietnam, Laos, and Kampuchea has led to a change in the comparison of forces in the Indochinese Peninsula that is more favorable than ever for the South Vietnamese revolution."

The actual development of the situation proved increasingly that those observations were very correct. The revolutionary forces had become much stronger than the counterrevolutionary forces in South Vietnam.

Later, at the plenary conference of the Political Bureau of the party Central Committee held in December 1974 to discuss the 1975-1976 strategic plan, i.e. nearly 2 years after the true situation became clear, Le Duc Tho stated that since the Paris Agreement we had, in general, evaluated the enemy too highly and ourselves too lowly. The actual situation on the battlefield had clearly shown that Zone 5 was afraid that if it attacked, the enemy would attack from the rear, but when the upper echelon ordered it to attack it was victorious. Tri Thien also feared the enemy. In the Mekong Delta, in December alone we eliminated more than 500 illegally placed enemy outposts. In only 1 month we attained 70 percent of the 6-months dry season norm. Now, the actual situation was clearly that we were stronger than the enemy.

Resolution 21 also confirmed that "The path of the revolution in the South is the path of revolutionary violence. Under all circumstances we must take advantage of the opportunity, maintain the line of strategic offensive, and provide flexible guidance in order to advance the revolution in the South." The resolution set forth the strategic guidelines and modes for each area: "The liberated area...must build and consolidate," "the contested area...must maintain our position and strength and gradually improve them..." and "the area controlled by the enemy...must lead the masses in struggle."

The determination of that strategy and the assignment of those missions weakened (although not entirely ending) the belief that the Americans and puppets could observe the agreement, and that there could be peace and stability. It also lessened fears that the enemy was strong. During that Political Bureau meeting it was also decided that we must resolutely retaliate against the enemy for having violated the agreement. Resolution 21 stated that "At present the active, positive direction most beneficial to the revolutionary cause of the entire nation is always holding high the flag of peace and justice, and struggling politically, militarily, and diplomatically to force the enemy to carry out the Paris Agreement, in order to defeat the enemy." Clearly, our party affirmed at the very beginning that the Paris Agreement was a victory for us, and that we had to struggle to force the enemy to strictly implement them and that our cause was just and we were certain to be victorious. We signed the agreement and honored our signature. We would also force them to honor their signature. We would not allow the Americans and puppets to sabotage the agreement. In order to maintain the accomplishments of the revolution,

we had to punish the enemy for violating the agreement by its land-grabbing and pacification activities. We would not retaliate passively in places where the enemy thought it advantageous to violate the agreement and attack us. We had to take the initiative by retaliating against them very painfully and attack the places from which their attacks originated and in places disadvantageous to them. In that spirit, in September 1973 we made an open declaration over our radio station to warn the enemy and so that the world could clearly understand our legitimate actions.

We hoped that after that warning the Americans and puppets would awaken so that we would not have to act and actually open fire. There were still conditions for carrying out the agreement; the door was still open at Paris and Tan Son Nhat. But Thieu may have thought that he was truly strong and that his U.S. master was still a solid source of support. Therefore, Thieu increasingly stepped up the fighting, despite the agreement and despite our warning, and hoped to rule forever in South Vietnam. The United States, for its part, thought that once it withdrew its troops it could still, by means of its Vietnamization strategy, remain permanently in South Vietnam.

Let us listen to a story told by an American, Weldon A. Brown, in his book "The Last Helicopter":

"Thieu continued to think that with U.S. aid and with the secret commitments made by Nixon, he had nothing to worry about. The commitments were still valid and he had been strengthened because the United States had provided him additional jet combat aircraft and very modern weapons, so much so that in 1975, when the U.S. Congress forbade the continuation of combat aid, Thieu still felt secure because of the commitments made by Nixon. The aid program and our promises caused Thieu to have a false sense of security, as a result of which Thieu turned down all efforts toward reconciliation or negotiations with the opposition and ignored the Paris Agreement. During the first year after the signing of the agreement, Thieu carried out small attacks and pushed the communists from a number of areas in the Mekong Delta and along the coast, set up outposts there, and resettled refugees in the newly occupied areas, and even had his troops raid Kampuchea."

"Thieu did not want the political process to succeed and weaken his regime, no matter in what form." Anthony Lewis wrote the following:

"Thieu prevented people from traveling from one area to another, and changed political prisoners into common criminals so that he could continue to detain them, and forbade all political parties except his own to operate. Thieu not only refused to observe the provisions of the Paris Agreement but regarded propaganda in favor of those agreements in South Vietnam to be a crime. When the ceasefire was about to take effect Thieu launched harassing operations. Thieu needed our tacit support for those acts, which violated the agreement, and it appears that he got his wish. Just before the ceasefire took effect Washington quickly shipped Thieu weapons valued at \$1 billion. According to one source, at the beginning of February 1975 Thieu told an American reporter that since the Paris Agreement was signed the United States had never pressured him to make political concessions to the communists, that is to observe

the peace-keeping provisions. Shipler wrote that Ambassador Martin and the United States did nothing to prevent those foolhardy acts and did nothing to persuade Thieu to carry out the Paris Agreement."

Thus it is clear which party violated the agreement and deliberately stepped up the war. It was essential that the violator be punished.